

OPERATIONS UPDATE



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

DPR KOREA: TRAIN EXPLOSION IN RYONGCHON COUNTY

30 April 2004

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

In Brief

Appeal No. 12/2004; Operations Update no. 02; Period covered: 28-30 April, 2004; Appeal coverage: 17 %; [\(click here to go directly to the attached Contributions List, also available on the website\).](#)

Appeal history: Launched on 26 April 2004 for CHF 1,652,000 (USD 1.25 million or EUR 1.06 million) for 12 months for 2,000 Families (10,000 people) for 12 Months; Disaster Relief Emergency Funds (DREF) allocated: CHF 50,000.

Outstanding needs : CHF 1,370,477

Related Emergency or Annual Appeals: [Annual Appeal \(01.68/04\)](#)

Operational Summary: It has now been slightly over one week since Thursday 22 April's powerful explosion at Ryongchon railway station located in North Pyongan Province, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Delegates from the International Federation's country delegation in co-operation with representatives of the DPRK Red Cross have spent the past few days in the affected area monitoring the distribution of relief items and conducting health and water and sanitation assessments. The findings of these field visits are described in greater detail within this operations update.

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Operational Developments

It has now been slightly over one week since Thursday 22 April's powerful explosion at Ryongchon railway station located in North Pyongan Province, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The explosion occurred when railway wagons, said to be loaded with highly combustible ammonium nitrate, blew up. The powerful blast that resonated throughout the entire town of Ryongchon obliterated the station, and devastated the immediately surrounding area leaving 161 people dead and some 1,300 injured. Among the dead were 76 children whose school was levelled in the blast.

According to DPRK's Flood Damage Rehabilitation Committee (FDRC) some 1,850 homes were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable, while a further 6,360 sustained partial damage. Among the large number of public buildings damaged were schools, the Ryongchon county hospital, a factory and an agricultural college. Those families left homeless are still temporarily housed among three temporary shelters, while some 270 families are relying on tarpaulins for shelter.

The capacity of the DPRK Red Cross with support from the International Federation's country delegation to respond quickly to the disaster is proof of the critical role good disaster preparedness plays in mitigating the effects of a crisis. This is the second time, the first being floods in 2001, that DPRK Red Cross and the International Federation were able to provide humanitarian assistance quickly relying on the national society's disaster preparedness centres.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Latest Activities as of 30 April

The overall objective of this preliminary appeal (12/2004) is to address both the short-term and long-term needs of the people affected by the explosion in Ryongchon county with a three phase operation.

Phase I: Distribution of relief items from Red Cross Disaster Preparedness Centres and other available in-country sources.

Shelter

Families and individuals who were left homeless due to the explosion were placed in one of three temporary shelter sites which were established following the blast. The current plan is that these families will be relocated to share accommodations with other county's residents whose homes are still habitable by the end of the week.

Approximately 270 families (some 1,100 people), are staying under make shift shelters made out of tarpaulins. The Federation's logistics delegate visited some of the families living in the make-shift tents on 26 and 27 April, and interviewed some of the families. The families are facing some hardship as the material that was in stock was not designed to function as tents. The shelters do not protect the families from the ground which means that many of the shelters are sitting in mud and water as Monday was a rainy day.

According to the Ryongchon Red Cross branch there are plans to get the families into houses in three to four days. There were also some 30 tents besides the hospital. Families in these tents are relying on tap water from the hospital.

All the families left homeless have received enough blankets, water containers (with water) and food. Those people who were staying under make shift tents have been obtaining water from the city supply from nearby apartments or the hospital in addition to water being distributed as part of the relief assistance.

Water

The Federation's water and sanitation delegate conducted an assessment of the immediate needs for water supply and appropriate sanitation over the period 28-29 April. After engaging in discussions with the authorities and

touring the sight, which included the county hospital, the findings are that the immediate needs concerning these areas are not many, and will be addressed in the rehabilitation phase.

The area that was affected by the blast was connected to the city water supply serving approximately half the urban area, comprising some 3,000 families or 12,000 - 15,000 people. This water system was rendered useless in the immediate vicinity of the blast.

In regard to immediate assistance, the International Federation's water and sanitation delegate offered to install several boreholes close to the affected area together with either an onion or bladder tank. These would be fed using a submersible pump and appropriately sized generator until the authorities would be in a position to provide water.

The authorities agreed to this proposal as it will most likely be several months before anything is implemented. If the shallow groundwater has been contaminated then it is better to act sooner than later to get deep boreholes installed.

The Federation water and sanitation delegate has instructed the Red Cross water quality monitor based in Sinuiju to take water samples from hand pumps and the city water supply. Eight samples, as a result, were taken from which the results should be available by next week.

The Federation should be ready to mobilise a drilling rig in co-operation with other agencies. The Federation will work with other agencies working in Ryongchon to support the water and sanitation needs of the affected area, in more detail as more information becomes available.

Distribution of Relief Items (26-27 April)

Two trucks carrying relief items arrived in Ryongchon on 27 April. The two trucks contained 4,000 blankets from Pyongyang and 3,040 water containers from Pyongyang and Sinuiju.

The second donation consignment of Republic of Korea National Red Cross (RoK RC) to DPRK RC by chartered air cargo plane arrived in Pyongyang today. This includes 5,000 emergency family packs and daily necessities.

Health

1. Ryongchon

Many of the windows and some of the walls of the 300 bed Ryongchon county hospital were broken due to the explosion preventing the hospital from operating at its full capacity. After cleaning the hospital, the facility beginning 27 April is once again admitting inpatients.

The hospital began treating outpatients on 27 April. Prior to the reopening of the hospital patients were treated at a temporary first aid post. The main problems which are being reported are: contusions, cuts, severe burns, epileptic symptoms and mental problems, conjunctivitis and rupture, and rupture of ear membrane. The operating theatre is not ready to be used and, operations are performed in the nearest industrial hospital four km away, or patients are referred to Sinuiju provincial hospital.

The DPRK Red Cross and Federation's distribution plan to Ryongchon is as follows:

- 25 April: distributed relief items and eight supplementary kits.
- 28 April: distributed 120 units of Ringer and 120 units of glucose 5% - plan to distribute two supplementary kits to the county hospital and one kit to the industrial hospital.

2. Sinuiju

The Federation's logistics delegate visited the Provincial hospital and Hospital No 1 in Sinuiju on 27 April. The delegate saw a number of patients and verified that the Federation kits were being used. The delegate was informed that the stock would last another 3-5 days

The DPRK Red Cross and Federation's distribution of medical supplies and medicine is as follows:

Distributions to the Provincial hospital

28 April: The DPRK Red Cross and the Federation distributed 16 boxes of medicine from Caritas Hong Kong; eye medicine from the WHO; and, 760 units of infusions. The plan is to distribute more supplementary kits and infusions.

Distributions to Sinuiju City 1 hospital

25 April: The DPRK Red Cross and the Federation distributed three supplementary kits. The current plan is to distribute two kits and infusions on 30 April.

Distributions to Sinuiju City 2, City 3 and paediatric

The current plan is to distribute one or two kits, and infusions to each.

Medicine and relief items from the Republic of Korea which arrived by air on 30 April in Pyongyang are being loaded onto trucks for immediate delivery to Sinuiju.

Coordination

An inter-agency coordination meeting is taking place on 30 April.